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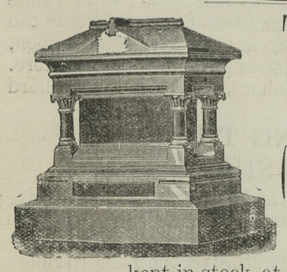
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COMMENCEMENT WEEK.

Sermon Preached to Christian Associations of Washinton College, Chestertown, Md.

BY REV. J. S. BOWERS.

Text—Philippians, 2nd Chapter, 12th and 13th verses.—"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: For it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of His good pleasure."

The writings of St. Paul are the best commentaries upon the life and teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ. The omnipotent Light which mitred his unholy brow upon the Damascus road was none other than the light of the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ. Captured by its all conquering power, his eyes were closed to the visions which Jewish hate and prejudice had inspired and his inner sense was left alone to have communion with the Lord. In speaking of this momorable occurence to the Corinthian Christians, Paul says: "And last of all He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." He did not mean by this to cast the slightest reflection upon the person or character of Jesus, but to emphasize the fact that the appearance and personal ministry of the Lord to him were special and extraordinary. Upon that wonderful event hung the whole story of his apostleship and I think it safe to say, that while the all pervasive, entrancing, soul illumniating presence of the Christ shone round about Him, the whole subject of Christian Evidences as well as christion doctrine became an open book; so that, Pauline theoloy is distinctively christian theology. The epistle from which the text is taken was written while the apostle was a prisoner at Rome. It is directed to a people in whom he was greatly interested Here the first fruits of his European labors were gleaned and from these devoted people again and again He was the recipient of tender remembrances. The whole letter may be said to be the out going of a great heart in love toward those for whose spiritual welfare he was especially solicitous. Borne to them by the hands of Epaphroditus, Paul's companion in sorrow, it abounds in counsels, exhortations, admonitions—commendations. At the particular point in the letter which marks the text, he has commended them for their fidility to duty not only while he was with then but in his absence as well and delivers to them the words of the text.

Contained within this great utterance as the germ within the grain, are several forceful and important propositions concerning which we will meditate together, profitably, I trust, and in harmony with the spirit and purpose of this occasion.

The first of these deliverances is God works in men, strives with them. This implies the great solicitude which God has for His children and the personal quest He is always making for His enthronement, God worketh in you. The second reveals the power within us which makes personal and possible the accomplishment of the Divine purpose—working in you to will and to do.

This implies the power of choice and assures us of God's willingness to be partner and helper to those who may open "the fast closed door."

The third announces the important and onerous task which the life has, which has deliberately and voluntarily enthroned the King Eternal. This implies strenuous effort in the manifestation of the thoughts and purposes of the King and a complete acquiescence in the Divine plan for the saved life in earthly service. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."

Let us draw nearer to these great facts and contemplate each in its order.

First—The Divine operations in the human soul.

When the Pharises inquired of Jesus when the Kingdom of God should come, He took occasion to deliver a mighty discourse in answer to their question. He said, "The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation, that is, so that it can be gazed at, neither shall they say, lo here! or lo there! For, behold, the Kingdom of God is within you," meaning by this not only that the King of the Kingdom with all the potentiality of Divinity was in their immediate neighborhood, in the midst of men, but that his Kingdom is in the man.

Dr. Meyers speaks of the Kingdom of God as an ethical condition in the soul. "The dwelling place of all The Heavenly virtues, charity and truth, humility and holiness and love."

It needs no argument I think to show that Jesus meant to teach the great facts in relation to the Kingdom—First its nature. It is a spiritual Kingdom.

Second—Its place of operation—within men, where dwells "The will, passion, reason, hopes, fears, joy, distress, peace, turbulence, simplicity, deceit, good, ill, corruption, immortality, a temple of the Holy Ghost, and yet oft lodging fiends."

Dr. Abercrombia, an old and trusted authority, in treating the subject of God's operation within the soul says, "And where is the improbability that the pure and holy One, who framed the wonderous moral being, may thus hold intercourse with it and impart an influence in its hour of deepest need? According to the utmost of our conception, it is the highest of His works, for He has endowed it with powers of rising to the contemplation of himself and with the capacity of aspiring to the invitation of his own moral perfections. We cannot for a moment doubt that his eye must reach its inmost movements and that all its emotions and desires and volitions are exposed to his view. We must believe that He looks with displeasure when He percieves them wandering from Himself and contemplates with approbation the contest, when the spirit strives to throw off its moral bondage and to fight its way upwards to a conformity to His will. Upon every principle of sound philosophy all this must be open to His inspection; and we can percieve nothing opposed to the soundest inductions of reason in the belief that He should impart an influence to the feeble being in this high design, and conduct him to its accomplishments. In all this, in fact, there is so little improbability that we find it impossible to suppose it could be otherwise."

"Ere we can offer our complaints,
Behold Him present with His aid."

This we sing. It is interwoven with our faith. We are afraid of the alarming declaration of the Almighty, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man."

"If thou withdraw thyself from us, ah, whither shall we go?"

Enough has been said, I think, to emphasize the fact and clear away any uncertainty concerning it.

We shall be interested I am sure to inquire, "Why does God work within the soul?" and "how does he do it?"

The Biologist and Sociologist are different persons because their view point is different. One sees the development of the life force in the human family and speaks of heredity and genealogy and kindred topics. The other views a man as the member of a great family. He sees him in his social relations and notes the upward movements of the race in refinement and civilization.

In all this evolution from social chaos to the realization of the highest ideals of social order, the thoughtful mind will not fail to note the deep solicitude of God.

The deliverance of the Children of Israel from Egyptain bondage is not only an interesting and thrilling historical narative, but a most graphic and delightful revelation of the personal manifestation of Divine power in behalf of men and in the accomplishment of Divine purpose. The basis of this Divine solicitude is the love of God--the love of God for us. The reason for this love is found in him, for "God is love." When Jesus began to talk to His disciples about His father's house and its many rooms, His disciples were filled with wonder. It was a new, strange doctrine to them this Fartherhood of God. Philip said, "Lord show us the Father and it sufficeth us."

The fact is, that no vision of God is complete or satisfying which does not include his love; and the weary, restless souls of his little children will always be disquieted until they feel that He will take them like lambs to his bosom. The revelation of the thought of God as a Father, establishes several most important facts in connection with our relation to the Divine Nature. First, if God is our Father, then are we sons, "Now are we the sons of God" heirs of God, joint heirs with Jesus Christ. The filial relation is clearly established.

Second, if God is our Father, we His children, then the fact of Divine providence—A Father's care for us is certainly assured. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him."

All those wonderful facts and incidents in our lives with which our own good has had to do, and which cannot be explained upon the basis of the power of any human instrument are the indellible commentaries upon the blessed faithfulness of the Providence of God.

He works in us and strives with us, because He loves us.

The purpose of God in the manifestation of His love toward us is not concealed—Sin has wrought sad havoc in the soul-spoiled the Divine image, thwarted the Divine purpose, darkened the conscience and distorted our vision so that the Divine ideals of life and conduct have no significance. He seeks to hndo this wrong. To do the best for us and make the most of us; to shine into our hearts; to take the scales from our eyes so that the soul-inspiring vision of God's great plans for our lives may link us to His own omnipotence.

"But God, who is rich in mercy for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, and hath raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of His grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus." The spiritual quickening and resurrection and the enjoymnt of the heavenly fellowships are the spectacle which will exhibit to the on-coming ages the riches of God's grace. And I think this clearly means that through the erection and perfection of human character, the marvelous power of the love of God is to be portrayed.

Now, how God operates within the soul is just as interesting as why He does it.

We must not fail to bear in mind that the great thought of God is to overthrow the dominion of sin in the soul; to breathe into us again His own life; to put into our minds His thoughts and to show to us what we may become and what we may do as the instrument of His mighty power.

The methods He uses in this great undertaking are both educational and inspirational, and the instruments He has selected may be said to be three.

First—The intuition of the mind—this comprehends certain great first truths which are in us, which we believe, because it is impossible not to believe them. The only accounting for them is that they form a necessary part of our constitution against which metaphysicians may argue so as to perplex the judgment but of which it is impossible to divest ourselves for a moment. We may call this Religious Instinct.

The second instrument is Revelation. We may use this word in its broadest sense and not affect the statement. But because of the limitations of this discussion, I must restrict it to the scriptures. Here the fact of God, his nature and attributes, his law, his government the unfolding of his infinite purposes and the exhibition of his marvelous power are all most wonderfully displayed.

And yet, however faithful we may find God's word to be in its message concerning himself, what men may become, what they may grow to be, what they may do through the exercise of his mighty power in their behalf is unmistakably shown. The biographies of the bible, invariably short, are the object lessons which God has written upon the trestle boards of the ages.

"Lives of great men all remind us,
We can make our lives subline."

The fact that their lives remind us, explains their educational value. It was a momentous occasion when, amidst lightnings and thunderings upon Sinai's cloud capped summit the almighty finger wrote upon tables of stone the eternal law of God. It was the pronunciation of his authority. Nature lent her strongest attestation of this most solemn truth. With this view I heartily agree. But I think there is something else to be seen as well.

Chiseled upon the indelible stone for all men in all ages are those eternal ethical principles which were intended of God to show to men how to be and how to do. Just as some mighty architect stamps upon the blue prints the lines and measurements of an important structure, showing to the builder how the work is to be done, so God the greatest workman of them all reveals to us, poor builders as we are, His way of making character.

The life of our Lord, marvelous, the subject of our fondest meditation is perhaps in its most important sense a revelation of the heart of God "He came to show us God." But is it not true that He said of Himself "I am the way?" He is pattern, exemplar to us and most emphatically exhibits how obedience, even though pressed to the extreme of self surrender and crucifixion, is the unfailing path to exaltation.

The third instrument in the Divine plan is the ministry of the Spirit. We cannot even so much as pass the borders of this fail field of truth. But let us hear the words of Jesus. "It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away the Comforter will not come unto you, Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth. He shall glorify me, for He shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you." This is His work. The inspiration of his presence, his efforts in our behalf, his strivings for our betterment, his intercessions with groanings which cannot be uttered, are all included in these educational, inspirational methods of God to bring us up to that enthronement of himself which makes the operations of his Kingdom possible.

Let us notice now the second of our main propositions.

The power in us which makes God's workings personal and possible standing like a sentinel, fully armed to guard securely the gateway of a city is the will which guards the citadel of our personality. To all approaching motive forces, this alone holds out the sceptre of approval or waves them back to silence. Here fond desire and warm affection make their plea and often find resistance.

It is the most frequently courted faculty in all the spirits realm.

All the invitations, exhotations, commandments, passionate appeals of scripture are addressed to it and their fulfillment rests upon its answer. The long continued operations of God in the soul seek the surrender of will. Every movement of the mind is known to him. His eye is present with it, when in any situation of duty or distress, the man realizes the presence and character of the Deity, and God seeks to show him how his moral feeling and his conduct appear in the eye of Him who seeth in secret. This is a power which shall be to him, direction in every doubt, strength in his utmost weakness and comfort in all distress, a power which bear upon this wonderful principle of his moral nature, when He carries on the mighty conflict of bringing every volition under a conformity to the Divine will. All the dreadful wreck of human life, all the lavish and unreasonable expenditure of spiritual energy of which we have read or known are the ghastly commentator, who, speaking for all ages, only tell the story of the obduracy of the will. One of the most pathetic

(Continued on page Sixth.)

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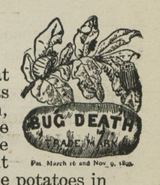
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